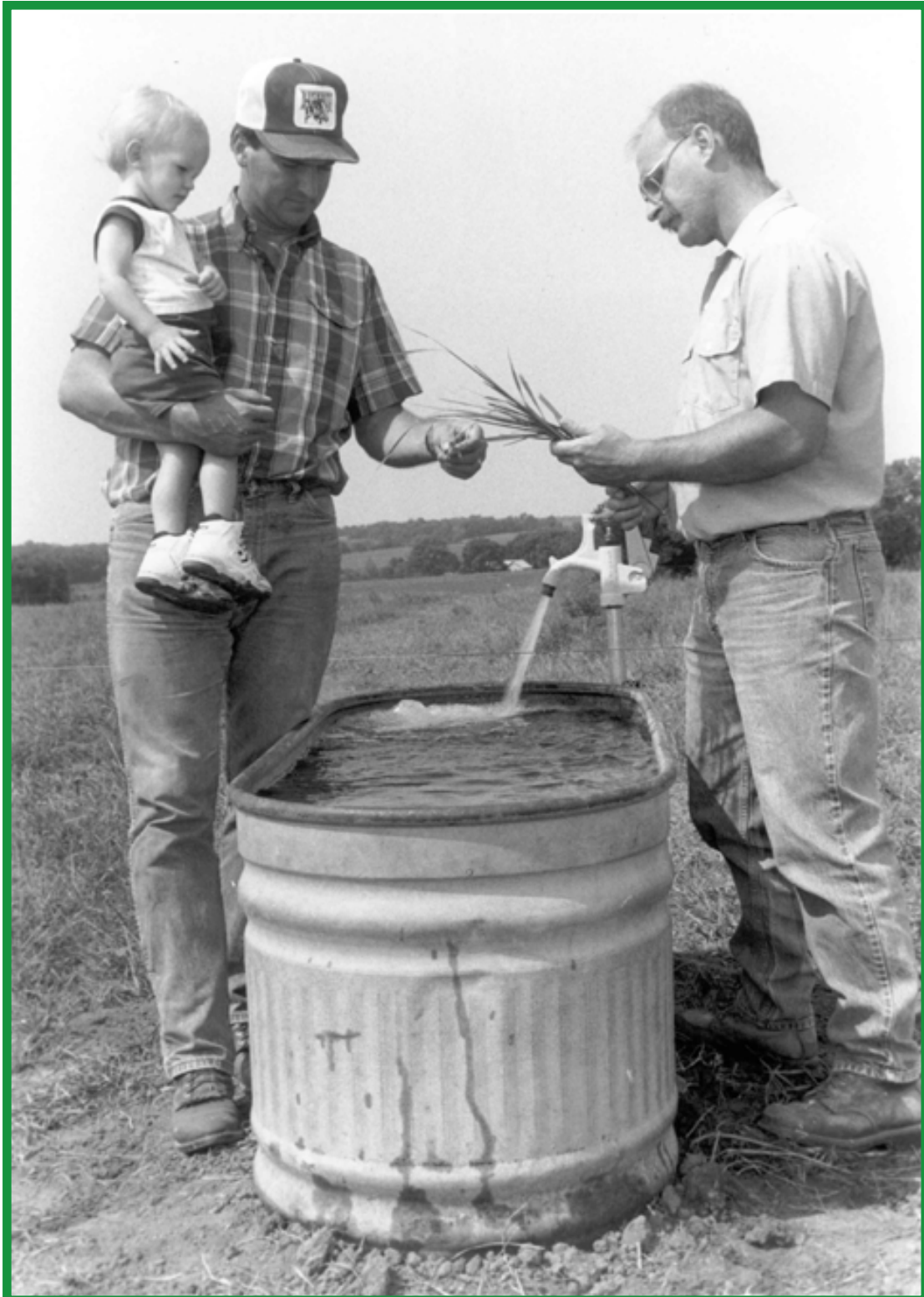


A Guide For Stream Teams Working With Agricultural Landowners



As a Stream Team, you've probably already learned that landowners along your stretch of adopted stream can have a tremendous influence on its health. Getting to know them, exchanging information, and cooperating on projects will be mutually beneficial and help provide long-term protection for the stream.

This guide offers tips for getting to know the landowners along your adopted stream and ideas for working effectively with them. Much of this is common sense but some of it may not be so obvious.

The first rule to remember: **Be sure you have all landowners' permission before going on their land.** This not only shows common courtesy and that you are considerate of their property and their feelings, **it's the law.**

Some background on communicating with Agricultural Landowners

Agricultural landowners are known for their independent personalities. This trait may be the only one that nearly all farmers have in common; it is what keeps them in their difficult business. They love what they do. It is a way of life to them, not a job. Most of them do not mind long hours and hard work - often with low pay. The average U.S. farmer produces enough food to feed 110 people, yet those who derive a major part of their income from the farm often qualify for food stamps or other government assistance and very few apply for it! You don't go into farming if you want to get rich.

This characteristic of farm life is where communication problems can begin. We must associate the use of the land with the landowner's livelihood. Most landowners consider themselves good stewards of the land and, for the most part, they respect our views on conservation. They are protective of their way of life and they do not appreciate being told that they are doing something wrong. After all, this is probably the way their father did things and his father before him. You may be stepping on tradition if you question their farming practices. So, be sensitive and open-minded when discussing farming practice options.



Another problem is stereotyping farmers. Agricultural operations are as different as fingerprints! This is called **operation diversity**. There are two factors that influence operation diversity. The first is a *physiographic* influence and can include climate, soil types, land formations, etc. These elements determined land use at the time of settlement and they continue to determine land use today. For example, corn is not a major crop in the Ozarks because of rocky, thin soils and steep slopes. The second is a *cultural* influence. During settlement times, families from all over the world selected where they settled for various reasons: abundant timber, wildlife, metallic minerals, good soils, the presence of major waterways, or the area reminded them of their homeland. They brought their lifelong dreams, a thirst for adventure, and an independent personality. They were determined to succeed in this harsh new world. Cultural differences developed from generation to generation and, although some mixing has

occurred, many differences are still present. This is evident in cultural practices used in agricultural operations like strip cropping, crop selection, crop rotations, filter strips, and wind breaks. The combination of physiographic and cultural influences make up operation diversity and can determine whether there are both crops and livestock, the types of livestock, the types of crops, and what types of cultural and mechanical practices are used.

Stream Teams should realize that this diversity extends across individual property lines, county lines, and watershed boundaries. Each landowner should be treated uniquely. Stream Team members should do at least **three things** to develop strong relationships, especially if the landowner is an agricultural producer.



1. Get to know the landowner and his farming operation. No matter how much you know about stream surveys, water quality, and litter campaigns, you may not accomplish anything with property owners in your watershed unless you have a general understanding of agriculture in your area. How can we expect the landowner to trust or respect our ideas if we know absolutely nothing about his or her operation?



If you and other members of your Stream Team need to learn about agriculture in your area, contact your local District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service or your local county agent with the Missouri Cooperative Extension Service. They can schedule time to meet with your Team and brief you on general farming methods in your area, including crops grown, types of livestock produced, major pasture and hay grasses, important conservation practices in your county, and other agricultural topics. Take notes at the meetings and ask questions. These resource professionals are valuable sources of information on agriculture. Also, if you have any friends who are farmers, talk with them one on one. The more knowledgeable you become on agriculture in your area, the more effective and successful you may be in communicating and gaining the trust of agricultural landowners. And very importantly, learning about agriculture and land management problems in your stream's watershed can help you and your Team do a better job with your stream projects.

2. Spend time with the landowner. This does not mean social visits. It may mean inspecting the stream, talking with them about their operation, asking and listening to their opinion, offering information and finally, telling them about your Team and your goals. When individuals spend time together discussing problems and solutions, working relationships are built.

3. Build relationships on mutual respect for each other. With some landowners this is easy, but with others it may take a considerable amount of time. Each time you meet with landowners, treat them with genuine respect and do not patronize them. The property owner should understand that your goal is to do what is best for their operation *and* the stream resource. Keep in mind they have much insight and history about the stream - learn from them to better understand the stream system.

If you cannot agree, respect their opinion and agree to disagree. Do not leave on bad terms or with harsh words. Remember, the agricultural operation will be there when we leave. Your goal should be to make sure the stream resource has a place within that operation. If they lock the gate after we leave then the stream may suffer.

Working with Agricultural Landowners - Dos and Don'ts

Do get to know what interests him/her.

This requires good listening skills and a sincere interest in the landowner. If he likes talking about his family, his farming operation, fishing, or any other topic, store that information away and use it the next time you visit with him. This will give you something to talk about and will probably gain you respect with the landowner.



Do plan farm visits wisely.

Contact the landowner in advance to set up a meeting with him or her. Try not to schedule meetings during peak farming seasons. If a landowner contacts you, be sure to respond promptly.

Do seek an expert opinion.

As you meet with landowners, you may be asked stream management questions that you don't feel qualified to answer. Please refer such questions to Missouri Department of Conservation's fisheries management biologists. You can call or refer them to their local Conservation Department office or call 1-800-781-1989 (voice mail) for information on who to contact.



Don't act like you know more than you do.

Most landowners are no different from us. They welcome the chance to educate individuals on their profession. Never try to snow a farmer; they will see through it every time! Do your homework before the meeting and if something comes up that you are not familiar with, don't be afraid to ask questions.

Don't expect a "typical farmer."

Avoid stereotypes that may have taught you everything you know about farmers. Chances are they have graduated from college and have many interests and hobbies outside agriculture.

Don't try to impress a landowner with your job or education.

In most cases they don't care a bit about your education or how smart you are.

Don't be patronizing.

Don't talk about the wonderful virtues of rural life or about how nice it must be to be an independent farmer.

Some Final Thoughts

Be ready to answer the following questions if you don't provide this information up front. Ideally, you should provide the answers to these questions before the landowner has to ask!

- ☐ What exactly are you doing?
- ☐ Why are you doing it?
- ☐ Will you share your information with me?
- ☐ How long and how often will you be on my property?
- ☐ Will you call me in advance?
- ☐ What is my liability for accidents?
- ☐ Am I responsible for problems you find?
- ☐ Am I going to find you in my deer stand on opening day?

These questions may seem outlandish to some; however, they give you an idea of the types of concerns landowners may have and the issues they must deal with. A few last points to follow include:

- ✓ leave all gates the way you find them,
- ✓ drive only where others have driven,
- ✓ let the landowner know when you'll arrive and how many people will be there, and
- ✓ take your trash with you.

Don't forget to invite the landowner to be a part of your group. They know their property better than anyone and may be willing to help you in your efforts!



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